

Committee on Education

March 11, 2015

Public Hearing

Testimony

By

E. Jean Gubbins, Ph.D.

Professor in Residence

Department of Educational Psychology at the Neag School of Education

University of Connecticut

The Honorable Andrew M. Fleischmann, Co-Chair, The Honorable Gayle S. Slossberg, Co-Chair, The Honorable Robert Sanchez, Vice-Chair, The Honorable Gary A. Winfield, Vice-Chair, The Honorable Gail Lavielle, Ranking Member, The Honorable Toni Boucher, Ranking Member, and The Honorable Members of the Education Committee.

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill No. 1055 (Raised), *An Act Concerning a Study Regarding Gifted and Talented Students*.

I would like to comment on both sections of the bill from my professional experiences as a former Connecticut teacher of gifted and talented students, Connecticut State Department of Education Consultant in Special Education with responsibilities associated with gifted and talented programs throughout the state, and as a University of Connecticut professor involved in gifted education and talent development.

Section 1. As a former Connecticut State Department of Education employee until 1990, I was one of two persons assigned to responsibilities with gifted and talented education. I am very cognizant of the importance of having a designated person solely responsible for providing programming and technical assistance to educators, parents, local and regional boards of education, and the general public about Connecticut's law (Section 10-76a-j) on identifying gifted and talented students with extraordinary learning ability and outstanding talent in the creative arts in grades K-12. The person needs in-depth knowledge about relevant research findings and best practices to guide the screening, nomination, and identification procedures. When there are commitments from local and regional boards of education to provide programs and services, it is imperative that decisions are based on

students' needs, program goals, objectives, and measurable outcomes. Programs and services must be viewed as added value to the students' current educational opportunities.

Professional development is also a critical component of the state position. Districts and schools need access to a consultant on gifted and talented education who can provide current statewide and national perspectives that will guide the development of comprehensive identification and programming plans.

As a professor who served as the Associate Director of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (1990-2013), which was the only federally funded research center in this specialized field, we conducted several studies throughout the country. However, when the studies required the existence of gifted and talented programming, we often had to bypass Connecticut schools as potential research sites due to the lack of programming at specific grade levels.

We did, however, make a strong commitment to ensuring that all of our research findings would be available to the general public at no cost. All of our research monographs, newsletters, practitioners' guides, and other resources remain on our website (<http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt/>). These materials represent an excellent source of reliable and valid information for educators, parents, and general communities throughout the world.

Recently, the University of Connecticut was awarded a new grant for the only federally funded research center on gifted and talented education. The National Center for Research on Gifted Education is implementing a large-scale study of identification and programming practices in three states (Colorado, Florida, and North Carolina) focusing on students who are traditionally underrepresented in gifted and talented programs and services (e.g., students from low-income families; students from small-town or rural communities; students of African American, Hispanic or Latino, or Native American descent; English learners; and/or students with disabilities). We cannot conduct our study in Connecticut, as the proposal required the existence of mandates for both identification and programming. Of course, all of our findings will be shared publically. It would be extremely beneficial to be able to share the findings with a Connecticut State Department of Education consultant in gifted and talented education who is able to determine which policies, procedures, and educational strategies would be beneficial for Connecticut's educators and students.

Designating a person as a State Consultant in gifted and talented education also illustrates the state's commitment to providing the best educational opportunities for it populace. It is

time to create such an important position. Questions must be answered and guidance must be offered from a person who is the Connecticut State Department consultant on gifted and talented education.

Section 2. The National Research Center on Gifted and Talented Education produced several research studies related to our research agenda on identification and programming in the early 1990s. It is critical to have the most current research data to make decisions about “what works in gifted education.” Some of the research questions that guided the quantitative and qualitative studies are certainly still relevant. However, the educational landscape has changed over two decades and new questions must be posed in an age of accountability for all student outcomes and, specifically, for the educational outcomes of students with gifts and talents.

Our prior research studies did not focus on using technology to extend and advance curricular options for students who have mastered the general education curriculum. With all of the technological advances, access to online learning, and the ability to enroll in online college level courses while still involved in the K-12 system, we need to understand the potential benefits and limitations. Findings from a research study of best practices for Connecticut’s educators and children will definitely inform the Joint Standing Committee on Education as to identification and programming needs of gifted and talented students.

I hope that Proposed Senate Bill No. 334, *An Act Concerning a Study Regarding Gifted and Talented Students* is fully supported by our legislature.

Respectfully submitted on March 11, 2015

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "E. Jean Gubbins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

E. Jean Gubbins, Ph.D.
University of Connecticut